

STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Olympia, WA 98504-5710

April 7, 2006

Dear Caregivers:

As you know, children and youth who are missing from care or who are absent from care without authorization often find themselves in high-risk situations. To better respond to this issue, the Children's Administration (CA) has updated its policy and the Foster Care Licensing WAC.

These changes create new reporting requirements for licensed caregivers and a quicker response time for CA social workers when a child is missing from care. Our goal is to keep children safe by working in partnership with you to effectively and actively search for children who are missing from care and provide a positive, solution-focused approach to working with them once they return to care.

When will this new licensing WAC and policy take affect?

Because this is an issue that impacts the health and safety of children, an emergency WAC has been filed that will take effect May 1, 2006.

WAC 388-148-0010, adds a new definition of “Children Missing from Care” and WAC 388-148-0123 has been developed with new reporting requirements for caregivers.

A permanent licensing WAC will be filed to replace the emergency WAC. Foster parents and other stakeholders will have the opportunity to review and comment on the permanent WAC during the normal rule-making process.

What are the new requirements for caregivers with the new WAC?

- I. New definitions for children missing from care are categorized into three definitions, these include:
 1. **The child's absence is not authorized and his/her whereabouts is unknown.** In this situation a child is missing without permission, the responsible adults do not know where he or she is and the child is not in contact with those adults.
 2. **The child's absence is not authorized but his/her whereabouts is known:** The child is missing without permission, but the child has been in contact with the caregiver or social worker or the social worker may have periodic information about the child's location.
 3. **The child is taken from care.** While very rare, this means a child's location is unknown and it is believed the child has been taken by another person in violation of a court order.

- II. New reporting and timeframe requirements include:
1. Report a child who is missing from care to:
 - o The assigned social worker or Children Administration's Central Intake if the social worker is unavailable (Central intake 1-800-562-5624 or 1-866-ENDHARM); and
 - o Local law enforcement; and
 - o Washington State Patrol's Missing Children Clearinghouse (1-800-543-5678 or 360-586-0030)
 2. Timeframe requirements for reporting a child missing is based on the circumstances and new definitions listed above. Caregivers are required to report the child or youth missing immediately or within six hours based on age and other identified risk factors (as defined in WAC 388-142-0123).
- III. Specific details to report to law enforcement regarding the missing child are outlined in WAC 388-142-0123, which is attached for your convenience.

Are there any supports for children missing from care?

To increase the opportunity of a safe landing for youth who have left care, a statewide hotline has been established. The hotline number is 1-877-550-HOPE. It routes the caller to speak with staff at the closest HOPE facility. Each facility provides 24 hour response to the hotline. The hotline will begin operation May 1, 2006.

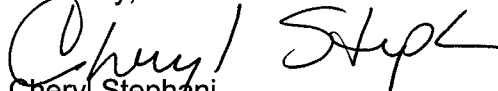
Children's Administration is sending a letter to all youth in care letting them know of these changes and the support available to them. A hope card with the hotline information is also included with this letter.

Who can be contacted for information about these changes?

A written copy of the policy and the WAC is available from the child's social worker, your foster home licensor, or by clicking on this link to the foster parent and caregiver web page: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/>.

If you have additional questions please contact your foster child's social worker. Thank you for all you do for children.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Stephani
Assistant Secretary
Children's Administration